BASSOON PIECES BY MOZART, SAINT-SAËNS, AND GALBRAITH:

A COMPARISON OF BAROQUE, FRENCH, AND GERMAN BASSOONS

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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Throughout the existence of the bassoon many pieces have been written for it, both solo and chamber works. Two of the most important pieces in its repertoire include Mozart's *Bassoon Concerto* in B-flat major, K. 191 and Saint-Saëns' *Bassoon Sonata*, Op. 168. A chamber work for four double reeds by Galbraith titled *Of Nature* was added to the chamber music repertoire in the last twenty years. Each of these pieces were written for a different type of bassoon and during different time periods in the development of the bassoon. It is important to know which bassoon a piece was written so that they know the tone quality, note tendencies, and general style the piece should be played as each bassoon type varies greatly.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was an Austrian composer and one of the most influential composers of the classical era.[1] He was born in Salzburg, Austria on January 27th, 1756, and died on December 5th, 1791, in Vienna, Austria. Even though he only lived 35 years he had a very prolific career as a performer and composer. He and his sister, Nannerl, were child prodigies of music with Wolfgang proficient on the violin and keyboard and their father, Leopold, saw their talents and educated them in music as well as other subjects.[2] Leopold traveled with his children all over the European continent to play for many public audiences and royal courts to show off their talents. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had his first known public appearance at Salzburg University in September 1761, when he was just five years old.[3] This was also the year of his first known composition, a miniature Andante and Allegro 1a and 1b.[4] He would go on to write many pieces in each genre at the time and lead a very successful musical career. His career would lead him all around Europe as a performer and composer.

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[1] Cliff Eisen and Stanley Sadie, "Mozart, (Johann Chrysostom) Wolfgang Amadeus," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed 21 Nov. 2020, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.bsu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-6002278233.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

When he was not traveling during his youth, he resided in Salzburg and worked for the Salzburg court.[5] He mostly wrote for keyboard and string instruments during his early career but he expanded to other instruments by the time he reached adulthood.[6]

Mozart's only surviving concerto for the bassoon is his *Bassoon Concerto* in B-flat major, K.191 (186e). This piece was completed by June of 1774, when Mozart was eighteen years old and it was his first concerto for a wind instrument.[7] It was commissioned by the Salzburg court that year and likely first performed by Johann Hofer (c.1745-81), the youngest of the three bassoonists of the Salzburg Kapelle.[8] Other possible soloists that Mozart may have had in mind for this concerto are Heinrich Schulz and Melchior Sandmayr, whose names were written in the court calendar around the time Mozart wrote this concerto.[9] The concerto may have been part of a commission of possibly three, five, or six bassoon concertos, but only the K.191 concerto has survived to today and any trace of the others have been lost.[10] The only other piece for bassoon that survived is a sonata for bassoon and cello K.292 (196c) which was probably written for Baron Thaddaus von Durnitz, an amateur bassoonist and composer in Munich.[11] It has been thought that the K.191 concerto was written for Durnitz, but there is no evidence to show that he had met Mozart or corresponded with him prior to his visit to Munich in December of 1774, months after the concerto was written.[12] It is unlikely that Durnitz would have been able to ask Mozart for the commission before then, but there is not enough evidence to

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] A. Hyatt King, *Mozart Wind and String Concertos* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 15.
[8] James B. Kopp, *The Bassoon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 105.
[9] King, "Mozart," 14.
[10] Ibid, 15.
[11] William Waterhouse, "Bassoon," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed 14 Nov. 2020, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.bsu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000002276.
[12] King, "Mozart," 14.

definitively prove it one way or another. Today, the concerto is the most important piece in the bassoon repertoire. It is frequently requested for auditions for colleges, graduate school, music festivals, and is always required for major orchestral auditions. Because of this, every bassoonist must learn the piece.

This bassoon concerto is a well-rounded representation of the technical and expressive range that the bassoon is capable of, and Mozart wrote the piece in such a way to utilize those capabilities. His writing style by this point shows that he had a great understanding of how the bassoon worked and what its potentialities were, which are expressed in the concerto. As stated by Martha Kingdon Ward, "We hear the bassoon in all its moods, and are moved to laughter and to tears almost imperceptibly… The andante is one of Mozart's most touching pieces, endowed with a quite heartrending pathos and beauty… The bassoon, with its quality of universal humanity, is capable of expressing in purest sound all the emotions we express but crudely in words."[13] Ward believed that Mozart's bassoon concerto was his answer to the instrument's critics.[14] This piece also shows off the virtuosic capabilities of the bassoon at the time and the expressive range expected from the instrument by then. Each movement shows off a different character and highlights the special qualities of the bassoon. The first movement is lively and quick, filled with fast arpeggios, scalar passages, large interval leaps, and trills. This is a very virtuosic movement that shows off the finger dexterity of the soloist, which is especially impressive given that this was written for the baroque bassoon with only four keys and many notes required difficult crossed fingerings or forked fingerings. The second movement is an aria with an elaborately embroidered tenor melody singing above a simple string accompaniment. This movement showcases the singing tenor range of the bassoon that was becoming

[13] Kopp, "The Bassoon," 105.
[14] Ibid.

increasingly used in other genres of music at the time.[15] The final movement is a rondo and minuet. It is set in the style of a minuet but the melody is varied through a seven-part rondo form. It is noteworthy that the soloist does not play the main 'A' theme until the final statement. Instead, the first few statements of the 'A' theme are orchestral tutti sections and the bassoon plays during the sections between each theme.[16]

Camille Saint-Saëns was a French composer, pianist, organist, and writer during the late 19th century and early 20th century.[17] He was born in Paris on October 9th, 1835, and died on December 16th, 1921, in Algiers, France.[18] In 1848 he entered the Paris Conservatoire where he studied the organ.[19] Saint-Saëns was a major composer during his time and he wrote in every 19th-century musical genre, but his most successful works came from sonatas, chamber music, symphonies, and concertos.[20] He was heavily influenced by the music of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Bach, and Beethoven and followed Viennese models and forms.[21] He also revived many 17th-century French dance forms in his music.[22]

Many of his works aimed to expand the repertoire of instruments that did have many solo pieces. He expressed in a letter written to his friend Jean Chantavoine in 1921 that he was focused "on giving rarely considered instruments the chance to be heard."[23] He had just completed his oboe sonata at this time and had anticipated working on a sonata for clarinet,

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[15] Waterhouse, "Bassoon."
[16] Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, *Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra*, K.V. 191 (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947), 7.
[17] Daniel M. Fallon, Sabina Teller Ratner, and James Harding, "Saint-Saëns, (Charles) Camille," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed 14 Nov. 2020, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy.bsu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000024335.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Camille Saint-Saëns, Peter Jost, and Klaus Schilde, *Fagottsonate Opus 168* (München: G. Henle, 2010), III.

English horn, and bassoon next.[24] The English horn sonata was never realized but the letter he wrote shows he had plans to write one, and implies the possibility that he may have written sonatas for more instruments had he lived longer. His *Bassoon Sonata*, Op. 168 was written in 1921 and it was the last piece he wrote for a wind instrument.[25] Saint-Saëns dedicated the piece to Leon Letellier, the principal bassoonist of the Opera and the Concerts Society at the time and later bassoon professor at the Paris Conservatoire.[26]

The sonata is in three movements with the last movement divided into two parts. This emulates the standard four movement baroque sonata form of slow-fast-slow-fast even though the piece is only three movements. The first movement is full of charm and lyricism as it starts in G major and moves through the keys of E-flat major and G-flat major before returning to G major at the climax. This movement is more difficult than it seems as there are several slurs of large intervals, including the last few measures when the bassoon must slur from G3 to B4. The cadenza-like passage in measures 30-31 provides a technical challenge in an otherwise non-technical movement as this line of the music does not lay easy on the fingers.[27] The piano does not play during measure 30 except for the downbeat, which allows the soloist the ability to stretch the tempo a bit.[28] The second movement is lively and lighthearted while in the key of E minor. A rhythmic motive of four sixteenth notes and one eighth note make up a bulk of the melodic material. This movement also features many large interval leaps of an octave or more. While this movement is very quick and technical there are still sections that are lyrical, like the section starting at the first key change at measure 70.[29] One of the technical highlights of this

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns: A Critical Biography* (London;Madison [N.J.];: Cygnus Arts, 1999), 285.
[27] Saint-Saëns, "Fagottsonate," 28-29.
[28] Ibid, 28.
[29] Ibid, 9.

movement is the range as the last note the bassoon plays is an E5. This is a very difficult note to get to speak on the German-system bassoon and it takes the right embouchure, amount of air, and a good reed to get this note out, a challenge faced by any bassoonist who plays this piece. The final movement is split into two large sections; the first is slow and lyrical and the second a fast technical Allegro that races to the end. The melody of the first part features a florid melody with a repetitive melody that sings over a simple accompaniment. There is short modulation to B-flat major at the end of the Molto adagio that transitions into the Allegro moderato, which then quickly modulates back to G major and acts as a short cadenza-like run to the end of the piece.[30]

Nancy Galbraith is a contemporary composer born on January 27th, 1951, and currently resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.[31] She has earned degrees in composition, one from Ohio University (BM, 1972) and from West Virginia University (MM, 1978).[32] She is currently the Chair of Composition at Carnegie Mellon University School of Music and holds the Vira I Heinz Professorship of Music endowed chair.[33] She has been a very active composer for over four decades and has written music in many major genres and for different types of ensembles including symphony orchestra, wind ensemble, choral music, concertos, chamber music, keyboard, and ballet. Many of her works have been performed and premiered by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.[34] Her extensive career has led her to play an influential role on the sound of contemporary classical music.

Nancy Galbraith's piece, *Of Nature*, is a double reed quartet with narration. It was commissioned by the University of Texas at Austin for faculty oboist Rebecca Henderson and

[30] Ibid, 8-9.
[31] Matthew Galbraith, NANCYGALBRAITH.COM, accessed March 12, 2021, http://www.nancygalbraith.com/.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

bassoonist Kristin Wolfe Jensen.[35] They premiered this work, along with oboist Susan Tomkiewicz and bassoonist Rebekah Heller, at the International Double Reed Society conference at the University of North Carolina in 2003.[36] This is a satirical piece that reflects on the attitudes towards female musicians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It uses direct quotes from two male figures of that time who had written degrading comments about female musicians at the time. One quote comes from conductor Gustave Kerker around 1900 which states:

> Nature never intended the fair sex to become players of wind instruments. In the first place they are not strong enough to play them as well as men, they lack the lip and lung power to hold notes, which deficiency makes them always play out of tune... Another point against them is that women cannot possibly play wind instruments and look pretty, and why should they spoil their good looks?[37]

The other quotes are taken from an essay written by journalist George Putnam Upton. He had written an essay titled "Women in Music" (1890).[38] Upton's first quote states "Woman, lovely woman, is always to be admired, except when she is playing in an orchestra. She is certainly not in her sphere, and any leader will find this out after he has had a few quarrels and instances of feminine disagreements."[39] His second quotes says that "Woman, emotional by temperament, cannot outwardly express herself through music."[40] The next quote by him states "One discordant musician might not be noticed in an orchestra, but if you have several women members, the playing verges on the excruciating."[41] Finally, the last quote by Upton describes women as:

> Great actresses who have never been great dramatists may express emotions because they express their own natures; but to treat emotions as if they were

[35] Program Notes - *Of Nature*, accessed March 12, 2021, http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ngal/z-ofnature.htm.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

> mathematics, to bind and measure and limit them within the rigid laws of harmony and counterpoint is a cold-blooded operation, possible only to the sterner and more obdurate nature of man.[42]

A different quote is stated before the beginning of each movement, each of which relates to the music of that movement. The first movement follows the first line of the Kerker quotes and the music responds with a pastoral setting through the form of a canon.[43] The second movement titled is “Separate Spheres" and this comes from the first Upton quote.[44] Galbraith uses a snippet from the quote “not in her sphere” as a rhythmic motive to emphasize the quote used and add more meaning to the music.[45] The music itself is made out of circular patterns which are often imitated by other players, sometimes in stretto-like form, which gives the impression that the musicians are not in their sphere. An interlude is placed between movements two and three in which two quotes are combined, one from each man, to set the tone and portray the message set in the music that Galbraith wrote. Three members of the quartet play in half steps and bend pitches to produce quarter tones to give the impression of playing out of tune, which matches the narration. The third movement title, “Discordant Machine,” plays off of the third quote by Upton stated during the interlude.[46] While the interlude played around with “discordant” sustained tones, the third movement introduces dissonances such as bizarre leaps of an octave or more and interworking rhythms to create a disjunctive sound.[47] These rhythms are spread throughout the quartet and eventually come together to sound like the parts work together. But this does not last long as the movement becomes more and more disjunctive as the movement closes out. Finally, the last movement is a fugue which is based on the quote that “the

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Nancy Galbraith, *Of Nature* (Verona: Subito Music Publishing, 2003), 1.
[44] Ibid, 3.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid, 8-9.
[47] Ibid, 9-15.

rigid laws of counter harmony… possible only to the sterner and more obdurate nature of man."[48] The main theme starts in the first bassoon and then gets passed around to the rest of the quartet in the traditional form of a fugue. The instrumentation becomes sparse after the final iteration of the main theme to bring the piece to a close.

Each of the three pieces mentioned were written for a different bassoon. Mozart wrote for the Baroque bassoon early in his career as that was the standard bassoon at the time. Saint-Saëns wrote primarily for the French-system bassoon since he was a French composer and wrote primarily for French musicians, and especially since he dedicated this sonata to a bassoonist who played on a French-system bassoon. Galbraith currently writes music in an age where the German-system bassoon is most widely used. Since the bassoonist who commissioned the piece plays on a Heckel bassoon, it can be assumed that is the instrument she had in mind when she composed the piece is a German system.

Mozart's bassoon concerto was written for the baroque or early classical bassoon of the time which was a fairly primitive instrument compared to the modern bassoon. The baroque bassoon was developed starting around the mid-17th century at the time of Louis XIV in France and it existed alongside the dulcian for several decades before the dulcian faded from popularity.[49] These early baroque bassoons only had three keys (low B-flat, D, and F) which means the fingering system was challenging and made up mostly of crossed and forked fingerings to achieve chromatics.[50] By Mozart's time, the bassoon had four keys, which added an extra key for A-flat as the forked fingerings used on the three-key bassoon were unsatisfactory.[51] Other keys began to be added during the 18th century but the four-key instrument remained the

[48] Ibid, 16.
[49] Waterhouse, "Bassoon."
[50] Kopp, "The Bassoon," 62.
[51] Waterhouse, "Bassoon."

standard instrument for this time.[52] For this reason, it is most likely that Mozart's bassoon concerto would have been performed on the four-key baroque bassoon during his lifetime. This piece utilizes a three octave range (Bb1-Bb4) which is impressive since bassoons at that time could not play much higher than Bb4.[53] It would have taken a bassoonist of high skill to be able to play this piece well during that time period with the instruments available. This shows how Mozart pushed the limits of music and instrument capabilities during his career.

The sonata by Saint-Saëns was written for the French (Buffet) system bassoon, which was the dominant bassoon system of the time and remained so until after World War II. The Galbraith's piece was not written for a specific type of bassoon, but it would most commonly be played on a German-system bassoon as that is the dominantly used bassoon of the 21st century. While the French-system was the most widely used bassoon up to the early 20th century, its use and popularity took a sharp decline in the mid-20th-century while the German-system became more popular.[54] There were several factors that played into this shift of systems. One of which were the conductors' changes in taste and preferences in sound. As world travel increased in the early 20th century, many musicians were exposed to different sounds which influenced some to switch to different instruments. An example of this was when the New York Philharmonic visited London to perform in 1928.[55] The bassoon section used German-system bassoons and their visit and performances influenced some English bassoonists to switch from Buffet instruments to Heckel instruments.[56] Many conductors began to prefer the sound of a Heckel bassoon which prompted the orchestras to either hire German-system bassoonists or ask their

[52] Ibid.
[53] Kopp, "The Bassoon," 86.
[54] Waterhouse, "Bassoon."
[55] Kopp, "The Bassoon," 161-162.
[56] Ibid, 162.

section to switch.[57] This transition occurred slowly throughout the 20th century. Sound movies also encouraged the transition as the recording equipment at the time could not pick up the sound of the French bassoon well but it could pick up the sound of the German bassoon.[58] This meant that more studio orchestras would have hired bassoonists that played Heckel bassoons. The United States made the switch early in the 20th century which influenced bassoonists in Europe. The transition across Europe began in Italy almost immediately after World War II.[59] In Belgium there already existed a small enclave of German-system bassoonists which would grow as French-system professors retired and were succeeded by German-system players.[60] The transition speed was fairly moderate until 1969 when the bassoon section of the Orchestre de Paris switched to the Heckel instruments, which led to a sharp plunge in the prospects of the Buffet instrument.[61] Spain followed suit in 1971 when important players in that country made the switch and by 1980 all bassoonists there were playing on German-system instruments.[62] Moving outside of Europe, Brazil used French-system instruments until the late 1980s.[63] Today, the German-system remains the most common bassoon around the world with some small pockets of Buffet bassoonists in different regions.

The massive decline in the French-system bassoon led to some bassoonists to advocate for its use and survival. One of those people was Maurice Allard (1923-2004), French bassoonist and professor of bassoon at the Paris Conservatory from 1957.[64] Part of his advocacy involved a ban on the German instrument in the Conservatory building and only taught the French-system in

[57] Ibid, 153.
[58] Ibid, 157.
[59] Ibid, 162.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 163.
[64] Ibid, 162.

the bassoon classes.[65] Despite his efforts, the German-system continued to gain prominence and eventually became the world standard for this instrument. The French-system is still in use in small pockets around the world such as France, Belgium, Switzerland, and parts of Latin America.[66]

By 1879, the standard French-system bassoon was a 22-key instrument.[67] This was achieved through the work of instrument makers Triébert, Gautrot aîné, and Buffet-Crampon working with bassoonist Eugene Jancourt (1815-1901).[68] Some minor modifications were made afterwards but that instrument remained the standard. The French-system bassoon has a narrower bore which allows it to be brighter and lighter in tone color with a more reedy sound quality.[69] This would have been the instrument that Saint-Saëns wrote for when he composed his bassoon sonata. This system also has a different fingering system that allows for more ease in the higher register. This is especially advantageous in the Saint-Saëns sonata as much of the piece plays in the tenor range and with the second movement ending on an E5. Saint-Saëns wrote in a letter to his publisher that he "saw in the method that I could ascend to E5; otherwise I would not have dared."[70] The note E5 is the highest of the practical range of the bassoon and it was rare to push a bassoon up that high in its range. Even the bassoon solo in *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) was controversial a few years earlier and that only pushed the bassoon up to D5. This shows the capabilities of the bassoon at the time and that Saint-Saëns wanted to push the bassoon to its limits.

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 178.
[67] Waterhouse, "Bassoon."
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Kopp, "The Bassoon," 174.

The development of the German-system bassoon in the 19th century faced many challenges. Octave keys were added on the wing joint, which are known today as the A and C keys for flicking and venting.[71] There was no standardization of bore or key work so no one set of fingerings worked for each bassoon.[72] Carl Almenraeder (1786-1843) became one of the most important bassoon innovators as his work significantly improved response and intonation of certain notes on the bassoon. He added keys and relocated others to extend the range of the instrument and he also altered the tone holes of the lower register by moving them down the bore and enlarging the size of them.[73] Even with these achievements, Almenraeder lost the singing quality that the early Dresden bassoons had but Johann Heckel (1812-77) sought to reclaim this while continuing the Almenraeder's work and making more improvements.[74] Compared to the French-system bassoon, the German-system bassoon has a heavier and thicker tone quality. Because the German-system bassoon has a wider bore and different layout of tone holes than the French bassoon, it is more challenging to reach notes E5 and above and while keys have been added to allow players to reach those notes, it is still significantly more difficult.[75]

Composers have written bassoon music for the instrument throughout different stages of its development. When those pieces were written, they considered the instrument's capabilities and potentialities at the time and wrote idiomatically to bring out the best sounds and challenge musicians. Performers of this music should consider the historical development of the instrument while also keeping in mind the style of the time period while preparing these pieces for performance. The bassoon has had strengths and weaknesses all throughout the history of its

[71] Waterhouse, "Bassoon."
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

development so when a piece was written for a period instrument that had certain tendencies, it is a good idea for a performer to consider accentuating those tendencies even on a modern instrument.

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